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ABSTRACT

This guide is the final in a series of eleven generated in 1978 as the result of workshops that focused on peer training, a different approach to teaching. The workshops provided the opportunity for members of eleven identified role groups to work together with peers to examine the relationship between their specific role group and community education and the ways in which they could stimulate their peers to improve role performance and effectiveness. This booklet focuses on community education as seen by government agency representatives. Discussions center on the provision of services and community education's impact on the provision of services. Topics considered include responsibilities of government personnel, interagency cooperation, benefits and problems of supporting community education, and involvement strategies. (Author/LD)

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GOVERNMENT/AGENCIES REPRESENTATIVES AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Role Guide Series #11

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PREFACE

This booklet is a result of two three-day Role Training and Peer Interaction Academies which were held in 1978 and funded by a training grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Community Education Program. The format for both Academies was designed to focus upon peer training, a method which has proven to be a useful teaching and information sharing approach. The sessions provided the opportunity for members of eleven identified role groups to work together with peers to examine in-depth:

a) the relationship between their specific role group and community education, and

b) the ways in which they could stimulate their peers to improve role performance and effectiveness.

Material development phases were interwoven with both structured and unstructured problem-solving activities. The follow-up activities and publications of the Role Guide Series were made possible from grants by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Through a sharing of information, all participants gained knowledge. The information shared in this booklet is intended for use both by experienced individuals and those just entering the field. The booklet can help the experienced individual to become more aware of additional aspects of the role and of directions being taken by others. It can assist the novice in gaining an overview of the role as seen by those who have worked in this capacity. The information also can be used as a means for guiding others in the community to gain a better understanding of the role and its relationship to community education.

AS GOVERNMENT/AGENCIES REPRESENTATIVES,
WE BELIEVE

We believe that one of the greatest discoveries growing out of the coordinated efforts of dealing with community problems and responsibilities is the knowledge of the enormous capabilities of existing human resources and organizations to solve these problems.

We believe that progress toward increased cooperation has come about because individual agency personnel have been willing to engage in frank, open dialogue about the common problems facing the total community, and equally, because they have been willing to serve on interagency planning and advisory committees.

We believe that community education is important, does work, is needed, is flexible, does deliver the human services, and is based on principles central to our form of democracy.

We believe that the philosophy of community education must be incorporated into every community-based project where there is citizen involvement.

We believe that with strong leadership and a commitment to community education the quantity and quality of needed services available to all community members will improve.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of community education, as perceived by the agency representatives, emphasizes people learning to help themselves and promotes a process that is people-oriented. They used the following definition in their work session:

> Community education encourages the development of a comprehensive and coordinated delivery system of educational, recreational, social, and cultural services for all people in a community and provides an opportunity for development of natural leadership in the community so people can be helped to help themselves.

The discussions and interaction among representatives of a wide range of organizations and governmental agencies produced a general consensus regarding the roles of those agency representatives in both the implementation of community education and the future directions required for increased coordination, cooperation, and commitment by involved agencies and the personnel within those agencies. However, consensus was not always easy to reach because the roles and positions held by individuals in agencies and the government sector are varied, diverse, and often misunderstood, and because community education often means different things to different people. The initial points of agreement were:

a) Community use of public school facilities varies among areas, but ordinarily, most buildings and grounds are considerably under-utilized. This is true despite a growing local agency need for community service centers.

b) Local agencies, institutions, organizations, and other participating groups are strengthened through community education implementation. As

community education programs grow, local agency programs are enhanced and expanded, and the co-operation and coordination which occurs among agencies nourishes enthusiasm upon which greater effort is produced.

The discussions of the role group centered around provision of services and community education's impact on the provision of services. It was agreed that in providing services, two general types of responsibilities must be accepted by agency representatives. One is actually providing the service. The second is providing the service as efficiently and effectively as possible. It is in meeting this second responsibility that the implementation of the community education process can enhance the functioning of agency personnel.

COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

It has been said that "agencies don't cooperate - people do." To this statement, the role group participants would add another, "people don't cooperate unless they have a reason to."

A major force in support of cooperation and coordination of effort is the increasing public awareness of overlapping concerns and interests. While many barriers may exist from past unsuccessful experiences and other built-in limitations, there is real support for interagency coordination in the interest of community and human resource development. Some of the other factors which are encouraging to advocates of interagency collaboration are:

- Emerging community education concepts
- Lifelong learning concepts
- Adult performance level concepts
- Information agency concepts
- Force efficiency resulting from diminishing resources
- Full-time specialists
- Interest in professional associations

RESPONSIBILITIES

In accepting the premise that community education means opportunities for all people in the community, agencies, and organizations must begin to understand the necessity for adjusting their services for the different groups needing service. They must begin to organize their service efforts in a manner that limits their place-boundedness; that provides more flexibility in scheduling in order to provide services at times when the community members can take advantage of them; and, perhaps most importantly, that focuses increasing attention on helping community members develop the skills and knowledge to begin helping themselves to solve everyday problems.

Participants in the role group discussions agreed that interagency/government coordination and cooperation must take place in order to have maximum delivery of services and a minimum of overlapping. They also agreed that initiating and sustaining cooperative activities among agencies is often a time consuming and difficult task. They believed that if cooperation and coordination were to become a reality, agency personnel must accept varying amounts of responsibility in the following areas:

1) Communication, both within and among agencies. By serving as a facilitator/leader, an agency representative can initiate dialogue among other representatives. The facilitating agency representative can indicate a willingness to cooperate/share, with the arrangement not necessarily being reciprocal. The indication of a willingness to cross agency lines to provide community services, of a willingness to utilize innovative ideas, and of a commitment to work with the community in addressing their needs, often forms the foundation for the establishment of on-going relationships among agencies.

2) Needs assessment. Discussions were based on the premise that agency personnel are committed to providing their service to all community members who need it. Within the area of needs assessment, there are several opportunities for an agency representative to foster cooperation. They include:

a) Promoting the involvement of citizen input and the subsequent "listening" to citizen needs and reacting positively.

b) Working with other agency representatives to develop and implement joint needs assessments.

c) Working with others to analyze needs assessments that already have been completed.

d) Participating willingly in needs assessment.

e) Participating on and/or monitoring sub-state planning councils, manpower planning councils, and revenue-sharing and community development planning meetings to facilitate program coordination to meet the needs of the target audience.

3) Sharing relationships. Agency representatives committed to establishing relationships with other community agencies must demonstrate, as well as indicate, a willingness to share resources, both human and fiscal, and to participate in joint planning. The agency representative should provide information to all other community groups that might be able to form a linkage, should know who all the other agency representatives are that are functioning in a similar role, and should help establish who has prime responsibility for programs offered or sponsored under a joint agreement.

BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS

In order for an agency or organization to support actively the concept of community education in general and interagency coordination in particular, consideration must be given to how the agency and community will benefit. The following benefits were identified:

- Sharing of experiences, concerns, and resources to improve program effectiveness and to reduce duplication
- Reaching a greater target audience
- Avoiding duplication of facility construction
- Providing increased services for fewer dollars expended
- Providing better quality service to more community members
- Providing a wider variety of services responsive to community needs
- Gaining greater input into the decision-making process of the who, what, when, where, and how of community services

As communities seek greater return from taxpayers' investments, interagency coordination will become increasingly important. Elimination of unnecessary and undesirable duplication not only has the benefit of improving community members' respect and trust, but it also achieves the more tangible benefit of allowing the agencies involved to maximize the services provided through more effective use of the limited resources. Through cooperative efforts agencies may agree on overall goals and priorities for services as well as determine which agency or agencies can best provide a desired service.

Accompanying the benefits of interagency cooperation and coordination there are also problems or areas of concern. Major problems identified by agency representatives include:

- Protection of agency "turf"
- Competition for tax dollars
- A resistance to change because of the closed mindedness of agency personnel
- Fear of public scrutiny and/or a fear of citizen involvement by the agency
- Citizen apathy and lack of desire to become involved

Of the problems listed, agency and organization representatives believed that the resistance to change is due mainly to a desire to protect one's turf. There was apprehension expressed regarding the possible losses to an agency when a cooperative arrangement is undertaken.

A strategy suggested by agency personnel to facilitate breaking down resistance to change begins with identification of one program of mutual interest and the development of mutual trust from the initiation of a short-range demonstration or "pilot program." Every agency needs to have a vested interest in the success of the project in order to follow through on the commitment made. Input should be solicited from all agencies to be involved. Every opportunity should be taken to encourage informal discussion regarding problem areas that might be encountered. These discussions often result in joint planning and problem solving. As the number of interagency activities and programs increase and a variety of agencies become involved, the ideal result of the interaction is the formation of an interagency council to help assess needs and coordinate service efforts.

INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES

In order to facilitate interagency cooperation, an agency representative must understand the community's political system and be able to function effectively within that system. Knowledge of the system usually can be gained by observation and answers to specific questions. However, achieving the ability to function effectively within the political system will depend on the type of system, and a representative's position and personality.

In order for interagency cooperation to expand and grow within a community, it must become a politically and ethically accepted practice. Achieving acceptance depends on the representativeness and the community's regard for those involved in cooperative agreements and joint ventures. When an interagency council exists, its members frequently are successful in influencing others in similar roles. Advisory committees' activities also may assist in the creation of linkages among agencies.

Other suggested strategies for increasing involvement in and a commitment to the concepts of community education include:

- Identifying, studying, and publicizing successful interagency experiences in coordination.
- Establishing non-threatening settings for political leaders and agency personnel to get to know one another.
- Creating intergovernmental study committees, with public participation, to identify barriers to coordination, areas of common concern, and operational guidelines.
- Capitalizing on citizen concerns about cost-

effectiveness and improved delivery of services while providing publicity regarding creative uses for public facilities.

- Encouraging the view of a reduction of sensitivity toward "protection of the turf" on the part of policy leaders and agency personnel.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Several social forces within a community are seen by the agency representatives as having a positive effect on the future of community education. There is a growing awareness of the resources, information, and services that are or can be made available to the public. There is a movement toward a more democratic way of life with the general public demanding an increased voice in the community governance. Citizens are demanding more accountability, more services, and more efficient use of their money. They are frustrated with the complexity of the governmental system, with the insensitivity of policy-makers, and with the apathy and non-caring attitude of many organizations. Venting of these frustrations is beginning to be directed toward agencies and organizations that seem to be unresponsive to community needs because of organizational/agency jealousies and the need to protect the internal security of that agency.

Interagency efforts involving participation of citizen groups appears to be the most viable approach to launching the formal community education program in many areas. Self-orientation for individuals within the agencies in the process and concept of community education must be the first step.

Expanded citizen participation provides an impetus to increased involvement and to the commitment of resources. The commitment of resources is necessary to guarantee continuation. Informal arrangements may be viable at the beginning of a program, but formal agreements in written form are necessary to gain a financial commitment on the part of all agencies involved, including the school system.

The political process must not be forgotten. It will be extremely important to educate the policy-makers regarding the totality of community education concepts. With the combination of increased knowledge, increased visibility of program results, and citizen involvement, the policy makers can begin to impact the legislative and political support base for community education.

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